



# News Release

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## **Puget Sound shellfish areas see improvements in vital water quality measure**

*Levels of fecal contamination steadily declining in many areas since 2003*

**OLYMPIA** — Puget Sound shellfish areas long-impacted by contamination from human and animal waste have seen a steady reduction in fecal pollution since 2003. That’s according to a [Department of Health analysis](#) of over 50,000 tests carried out in 38 shellfish growing areas.

“It’s encouraging to see improvements in Puget Sound’s shellfish growing areas,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “This is good news for shellfish lovers, our shellfish industry, and for those who have worked hard to reduce pollution.”

State health workers collect water samples for fecal coliform bacteria at more than 1,200 sampling stations in Puget Sound to verify that shellfish are safe to eat. The agency evaluated growing areas most affected by fecal pollution. The areas were sampled at the same frequency and same locations for more than a decade.

Fecal coliforms are bacteria that live naturally in the intestines of warm-blooded animals, including people. High concentrations of fecal bacteria in the water mean that illness-causing pathogens might also be present. Shellfish take up and store the bacteria as they filter their food from the water. People who eat the contaminated shellfish can get sick.

The improvements are due to better management of sewage systems, agricultural waste, boating waste and stormwater runoff near shellfish areas. Many of the 38 areas have been working on long-term pollution control efforts carried out by property owners, local governments, tribes, state and federal agencies, volunteer groups, and shellfish farmers. The Puget Sound Partnership coordinates clean up and water restoration work going on in many areas of Puget Sound. Improved water quality will help meet the Partnership’s target to increase Puget Sound’s harvestable shellfish areas by 10,800 acres.

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The Department of Health is responsible for the safety of commercial shellfish harvested in the state. The department's Office of Shellfish and Water Protection uses national standards to classify all commercial shellfish harvesting areas.

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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